

Garden Line - October 2010

by Brent Moon - HPARD Urban Garden Manager

October is considered by many to be the real start of fall, even though it officially started last month on the 23rd. Regardless, here in Houston we don't generally get a real cool down until October. This is a great time to be out in your garden, as temperatures are more pleasant and the bugs are present in lesser numbers. Here are some things to keep in mind as we head into fall:



If you haven't yet started your vegetable garden, you still have time to get things started in order to have a great harvest this winter. I typically start my winter garden this month and plant a variety of veggies, such as lettuce, cabbage, carrots, radish, mustard greens, Swiss chards and kohlrabi. Other plants that do well this time of year include beets, broccoli, cauliflower, collard greens, kale, onions, turnips, globe artichoke, Brussels sprouts, and leeks. Don't forget that many herbs do well in the cooler months, including cilantro, oregano, dill, fennel, garlic chives, and parsley.

Plant some of these and you'll be amazed

at how productive gardens can be in Houston this time of year. My garden is a mere 9'x13', and last year I gave away lettuce and mustard greens by the bagsful!

On the ornamental side of things, October is a great time for planting shrubs and trees. Planting them now will give them plenty of time to get their roots established and be in much better shape to handle the stresses of summer next year.

This is also the time to divide daylilies. Don't worry about being too gentle with them; simply slice them in half or in thirds with a spade, depending upon how large the original clump is, and replant as soon as possible. By spring, they'll be blooming like nothing ever happened to them. This is a good opportunity to increase the number of plants you have or trade with friends.



As we get closer to winter, you may need to start thinking about bringing in house plants that you put outside in the spring. Many house plants enjoy being outdoors in the shade during summer because it replicates the growing conditions of their native environment, which is usually shady and humid. Now is a good time to evaluate these plants, as many of them have shown their appreciation at being outside all summer by growing prolifically. I have often brought a plant back inside, only to realize that it is now waaaaay bigger than when I originally put it outside and it is much too large for the spot I'd planned to overwinter it. It's amazing how they don't look so large out on my patio, but inside next to our couch or aquariums, they just seem huge.



Begin by cutting them back by no more than 1/3. You can either remove top growth, thin them out, or both. It is also important this time of year to evaluate for pests prior to bringing your plants inside. Houseplants are notorious for harboring hitchhikers that you'll have to deal with all winter if you don't take care of them now. I usually start by blasting them really well with a stream of water to dislodge any pests (especially spider mites). I then follow up with an application or two of insecticidal soap or orange oil to take care of any remaining pests. You may want to do this a couple of days prior to moving your plants inside, in case they need more than

one treatment. Be sure to do a good job, as pest populations can really explode once in the warm environment of your home. Your plants won't be happy about that and neither will your spouse!